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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention
of Discrimination and
Protection of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Fourteenth session
29 July-2 August 1996
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

CONSIDERATION OF A PERMANENT FORUM FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Note by the Secretariat

1. At its thirteenth session the Working Group on Indigenous Populations had before it the report of the workshop on the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1995/7), held in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1995/30. In its report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/24), the Working Group expressed its warm appreciation to the Government of Denmark and the Homerule Government of Greenland for organizing the workshop in Copenhagen. The Working Group recommended that the report of the Copenhagen workshop be circulated to Governments and intergovernmental and indigenous organizations for their comments.

2. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations supported the idea that a permanent forum should be established in the course of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and considered that it would be appropriate for such a forum to report to the Economic and Social Council, and that its mandate should cover issues such as human rights, health, development, environment, education and culture. The Working Group also expressed the view that such a forum should be open to all indigenous people, regardless of whether they had consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

3. The Working Group recommended that a further workshop be held prior to its fourteenth session, and that the next workshop elaborate further the practical aspects relating to the establishment of such a forum. The Working Group also recommended that the Secretary-General should review existing procedures and programmes within the United Nations relating to indigenous people.

4. The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities endorsed the Working Group's recommendations in its resolution 1995/39 of 24 August 1995, including the recommendation that the Centre for Human Rights organize a second workshop on a possible permanent forum for indigenous people, and that the Secretary-General prepare a review of existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes within the United Nations for promotion and coordination of the rights of indigenous people. It also requested the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the workshop to Governments and intergovernmental and indigenous organizations inviting them to express their views and to report on the comments and suggestions received to the Working Group on its fourteenth session. Notes verbales and letters together with copies of the report of the workshop were sent on 10 January 1996. As of 31 May 1996, no comments or suggestions had been received.

5. The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/157, recommended that the Secretary-General, drawing on the expertise of the Commission on Human Rights, as well as the Commission on Sustainable Development and other relevant bodies, undertake a review, in close consultation with Governments and taking into account the views of indigenous people and of the existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes within the United Nations concerning indigenous people, and report to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. The General Assembly also recommended that the Commission on Human Rights, drawing on the results of the review and the Copenhagen workshop, consider the convening of a second workshop on the possible establishment of a permanent forum.

6. At its fifty-second session the Commission on Human Rights had before it the report of the workshop held in Copenhagen, the report of the Working Group, Sub-Commission resolution 1995/39 and General Assembly resolution 50/157. In its resolution 1996/41 of 19 April 1996, the Commission decided to continue consideration of a second workshop at its fifty-third session. It requested the Secretary-General to have the review completed and circulated to Governments, relevant intergovernmental organizations and indigenous organizations for their comments well in advance of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. The Commission also urged the relevant United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and financial institutions responsible for the existing relevant mechanisms, procedures and programmes to facilitate the review. The Commission further requested that the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at its fourteenth session give priority consideration to the possible permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations and contribute to the ongoing review.